

Faith In Our Future Together Recoverable Grant Program Frequently Asked Questions

What are the program's priorities?

Our paramount priority is to help churches respond effectively to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic by providing financial and other resources. Rather than specifying the kinds of responses we will support, we are leaving it to congregations to determine what responses are most appropriate.

Our intention to make God's love and justice real underlies this initiative. We see the intersection of the pandemic with racism manifested in congregations in at least three ways: Pre-existing vulnerability, magnified disruption, and undermined responses. This provides us with an opportunity to live into our Conference's vision. A program goal is to promote the systemic changes necessary for people of color to gain access to financial resources that have not always been accessible and to build a Conference that aligns its financial and human resources with its justice-making efforts.

A second priority is supporting new approaches to mission and ministry. This may mean moving away from current facilities, staffing models and programming approaches to something new. We are less interested in institutional maintenance and more interested in new initiatives to work among God's people to create a more compassionate, just and peaceful world.

A third priority to promote interdependence. A characteristic of churches in decline is autonomous thinking. We would consider "seed money" for new partnerships with other organizations, including other UCC churches.

What type of proposal can be funded?

As illustrations, but without the intent to exclude other proposals:

- Salaries for new positions, or salary increases for current staff being given new responsibilities/initiatives to oversee.
- Programs or projects to strengthen the mission and ministry of the church.
- Engagement or retention of professional services to support the congregation's leaders.
- Capital improvements, with limitations

What capital improvements projects may be eligible for funding?

We will assess the anticipated impact of the capital improvements. Capital improvements to restore what was and that may tether churches to what was rather than moving to what will be are not going to be eligible. Capital improvements that help create new capabilities or are an integral part of a process to move in a new direction, will be eligible. For example,

improvements to kitchen and dining facilities that will support an outreach initiative to provide meals for people facing food insecurity might be considered.

Are any projects ineligible for funding?

Proposals to fill revenue gaps in ways that simply maintain facilities, staffing and program models that were part of an existing pattern of decline are less likely to be funded.

What factors will improve the likelihood of funding for existing facilities, staffing and programs?

An existing pattern of growth or stability that was disrupted by the pandemic. Other factors that will increase the likelihood of funding under these circumstances will include:

- The congregation is diverse or includes members who are underrepresented in the Conference, particularly among historically marginalized people;
- The congregation bears witness to injustice;
- The congregation is located in a geographic area or community of people who might not otherwise have access to a United Church of Christ congregation; and/or
- The congregation has the potential to model or teach something to the wider church.

What congregations are eligible to apply for funding? Are only congregations of color or with significant diversity eligible?

All SNEUCC congregations are eligible. Congregations of color and with significant diversity are particularly encouraged to apply. Churches with less racial diversity should evidence a commitment to addressing the ways that predominantly white congregations have intentionally or unintentionally contributed to systemic racism and other racial injustices.

Are churches with endowments eligible?

We understand that endowment assets are donor restricted and only income* is available for spending. We also understand that the use income is sometimes also restricted. These restrictions will be taken into account when applications are reviewed. If an applicant has unrestricted funds functioning as endowment, applicants will need to justify why it is more appropriate to use the Conference's unrestricted funds functioning as endowment – the source of the grant funds - than the applicant's assets.

*Income is typically determined using a total return spending policy and is not limited to dividends and interest.

How will proposed use of funds be evaluated?

Using an evaluation rubric, we will look at the anticipated impact of the proposed use of funds. Key criteria include:

- Will the proposed use of funds help to remedy the disruption caused by the pandemic, including the manifestations of racism?
- Will the proposed use of funds make disciples of Jesus?
- Will the proposed use of funds make God's love and justice real?
- Will the proposed use of funds result in adaptive and transformative change and bring new life?
- Will the proposed use of funds result in partnerships promoting the common good?

What other factors will be considered?

We will evaluate congregational vitality in two dimensions: Vitality and viability.

Vitality is the sense of being spirit filled and vitality in the sense of being necessary, indispensable, or essential to the Conference. We will also evaluate viability, as indicated by the ability to embrace transformation and having capable leaders and processes. A congregation clearly on a path to closure in the short-term is unlikely to be assessed as viable, as the direction of the congregation indicates a lack of ability to embrace change. The last factor assessed will be the willingness and ability of the congregation to enter into a Covenantal Partnership.

How will award decisions be made?

After an initial review of applications, we will meet with the leadership of the most promising applicants to review the proposal and discuss the opportunity. The Committee will also review applications with appropriate Conference staff. When the Committee approves an application, the church will be invited to work with Committee members and Conference staff to draft a Covenantal Partnership Agreement, a document describing all of the mutually agreed upon terms and conditions. Disbursement of funds is contingent upon mutual acceptance of the agreement.

What happens if proposed ideas fail, or don't develop as hoped? Are we obligated to return any funds at that point? What is the process for revising the proposal during the grant period?

The terms under which the grant may be recovered will be included in the Covenantal Partnership Agreement. There will be no obligation to return funds solely because hoped for

outcomes were not achieved. There will be provisions in the Covenantal Partnership Agreement.

What are the reporting guidelines?

Reporting guidelines will be addressed in the Covenantal Partnership Agreement.

What is the timeline for the grant process?

The initial deadline for grants is January 15th. We anticipate that the initial round of applications will not exhaust available funds and that, there will be subsequent opportunities to apply, however, this cannot be guaranteed. We anticipate making initial decisions by February 15th.

Who can we speak to if we have questions about our proposal?

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